Oral History Recording Transcript Kevin Trickett

Lorraine Simpson, I'm interviewing Kevin Trickett for the Kirkgate Calling Project. It's the 24th April at 11.35. Thank you for volunteering to be interviewed Kevin.

I'm happy to do it.

Would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself and how you come to be living in Wakefield?

Ok. My name's Kevin Trickett and I'm currently President of Wakefield Civic Society so I have quite an interest in what's happening in Wakefield but originally my parents both lived in the area around Kirkgate station. My mum, although born in Crofton, grew up there, eventually her parents moved to No. 3 Marsland Place, which is off Berners Street, very close to the station and my dad grew up in a house on South Street which backed onto Kirkgate Station. And I don't know quite when they met but they got married in 1953 at St Andrew's Church on Peterson Road and they bought a house at Newton Hill which is where they moved to when they got married but I was born in the County General Hospital which of course overlooked Primrose Hill. Long since gone, of course. So I'm very local, I grew up in Newton Hill of course myself, but my grandparents on my mum's side continued to live at Marsland Place. My dad's father moved to the Brunswick Street bungalows so I remember visiting both my grandparents in the area many times and when my mum's parents moved from Marsland Place they moved to Charles Street, Flat 31 Charles Street and from there when we went for our afternoon teas on a Saturday I always managed to position myself so I could see Kirkgate Station to watch the trains coming in and out whilst I was eating my tea.

Thank you. Do you have any recollections at all about Kirkgate as it was?

Kirkgate the area or Kirkgate the station?

Both? Either?

Yes, again I can remember walking into my grandparent's house in Marsland Place and then later their flat in Charles Street and my dad's father, Brunswick Street bungalows, I do remember going up and down from Kirkgate, up William Street and Park Street and Leigh Street and I remember some of the demolition which had already taken place I think when I was old enough to have memories. The old Empire Cinema that used to be down at the bottom of Kirkgate had gone, it was just a development site or a car park when I was a child. So I can remember the road widening, the modernization of that area in the fifties and sixties quite well. And of course I remember visiting Kirkgate Station, both for train journeys to Barnsley where my mum would go shopping and as a young lad interested in trains to do a bit of trainspotting although I never, ever recorded train numbers, I never saw the point of that (laughs) I would just go and look at the trains. And there was a café on Platform 1 that you could get into whether you were travelling or not and I would sometimes go in there and have a drink and just watch the trains. It was an excuse to be on the platform if you had something from the café.

Can you remember what the café looked like? What it sold?

No, I can remember, I would have been maybe twelve, thirteen, fourteen at this time, spending my pocket money on a cup of tea or whatever, but in my memory it was a fairly traditional station café with tables and a counter where you would go and order your food and drinks but much more than that I can't remember. I do remember Kirkgate Station being a lot busier than it is now. I remember it having the overall roof. I can remember the goods shed at the side of the station and there was lots of parcels and things delivered there either by lorry, the Scammell? Trucks and taken into the station and taken away from the station but they'd be on trolleys all the way down Platform 1, it was very busy, a very busy area indeed with sort of sidings just beyond the station which you could see from a footpath down the side of the current fire station. You could walk along there and you

had an elevated view where you looked down on the trains. So a secret place to go and watch the trains from.

What about the front of the station, as you approached the station, can you remember what that was like?

I can really only remember it as it is now. There were more buildings of course because you were going into a courtyard, the forecourt and there was the good shed to the left and the main station entrance directly ahead of you. But it's been semi derelict for such a long time that my enduring memory is of it as it is now, before the refurbishment. But I do have a very vivid recollection of it being a very busy, bustling station, steam trains coming through and although as somebody who's interested in trains, it might be heretical to say so, I was particularly interested in the British Rail green DMUs, the diesel multiple units. They were, I suppose the precursor of modern trains but you could sit at the front and there were windows at the front where you could see the driver's cab so you could see where you were going or if you were at the back of the train you could see where you'd come from. And they were always very smart and very comfortable.

What about the personnel that worked on the railway?

I can only remember one individual, I have no idea what his name was but if you were standing inside the station but not on the platform there were some concertina metal gates that they could open to let people through of goods and heavy loads through onto the platform and one day I was with my parents and we were watching the trains and I put my head through these railings, and of course they were concertinaed and as I was leaning on them they gradually closed and when it came to get my head out I couldn't get my head out (laughs) so, I don't know, the station master or whoever came down the platform, my mum said 'he can't get his head out' and he had me on for a bit but then he said just let go and let them relax and then you can get your head out so that's what I did. It must have happened to many young boys, I'm sure over the years. I'm not sure I should be laughing.

Thank you. Do you remember any of the train journeys you took from Kirkgate?

When I was working in Leeds as an adult I used to sometimes commute from Kirkgate Station either walk down from Pinders Heath, walk down and catch the train there to Leeds or end up catching the train back from Leeds to Wakefield sometimes coming in to Kirkgate Station. We're talking there about the mid 1980s onwards and it wasn't a station of choice by then it was just convenience in fact I preferred journeys to start and end at Westgate Station where there were facilities and a lot of people around. As a child, as I mentioned earlier, it was mainly going to Barnsley because my mum had relatives in Barnsley so we would go to Barnsley to shop and meet up with relatives and friends. Rather more than going to Leeds actually, we didn't go to Leeds very often but when we did go to Leeds we went by bus because the bus went straight past the door; by train we tended to go to Barnsley.

Thank you. You talked about the area walking up to the station and all the different streets, can you remember something about that?

Some of the buildings by then were empty and probably awaiting demolition but I do remember there being shops on the corner of William Street, a few remaining shops fronting onto Kirkgate. I can't tell you what the shops were, my memory's not that good of course and as a child I wasn't actually buying goods, it was my parents who were buying goods. But then the new shops opened on the opposite side of Kirkgate and there's a chemist shop there which has been there for some time and I used to have to go down and fetch provisions, you know, if my grandma had run out of something so I'd go down to the chemist shop and one of the things she sent me for fairly regularly was raspberry vinegar for the pancakes. For some reason you had to buy that at the chemist, I don't know why we had to go to the chemist to buy raspberry vinegar but it came in what looked like a medicine bottle. And that was a treat, with a bit of sugar, it went on the pancakes. So at least

once a year I used to have to go and buy the raspberry vinegar for the pancakes. But I'm afraid no I can't remember. But what I do remember though, is when we used to go and visit my grandparents, particularly on a Friday morning, on school holidays, there was an enduring smell of hops because there were some breweries down Kirkgate somewhere and the smell of hops was really thick in the air. Quite a nice smell but it was really heavy in the air.

Thank you. You talked about visiting your grandparents in that area, was there a strong sense of community at that time?

There was a strong sense of community in the sense that whenever I went into Wakefield with my parents, my mum and dad seemed to know everybody. They were always bumping into people and having conversations and if you went into the shops, there was a relationship with the shopkeeper because the shopkeepers knew my parents which as a child was quite tedious because it meant we spent a lot of time waiting for mum and dad to finish their conversations so we could go on and do whatever it was we were doing. I'm getting the same thing now, of course, as president of the Civic Society, lots of people know me so when I walk round Wakefield, people are always stopping for a chat. But as a child it was really irritating, pulling at her skirt and saying 'come on mum, come on, let's go, let's go, let's go'. But yes, people did know each other and of course as I got the point, sort of early teens where I started to take an interest in what was happening, one of the delights of going to my grandparents or other aunts and uncles was that they all had such stories about the neighbours, you know. Some of it was just gossip, Mrs So and So has, oh you'll never guess what's happened to…, and guess what's happened to them at No 10 up the road. Everybody knew each other's business so in that sense you have to conclude there was a sense of community, people knew each other, they were in and out of each other's houses much more than they do now. And there were some fascinating stories which I tucked away, maybe one day I could write a book about them all I suppose, if I ever got round to it.

Can I just ask you, you mentioned that you were president of the Civic Society, in terms of the Kirkgate area, you've talked about your memories visiting grandparents and aunts and uncles round there, is there anything you could tell us about the area around Kirkgate and how it's changed over the years?

Well as president of the Civic Society I have to take an interest in the history of the area because people are always asking me about the significance of certain buildings, when new plans come in, you know, are these acceptable plans for the area, what does the Civic Society think and I do guided walks around Wakefield so I've had to learn a little bit about the history of the place so using my own recollections of course I can sometimes put the reading I have done since into that sort of context. So Kirkgate Staion, as I say it was a very busy area and there were lots of people coming and going, there were shops in the area, but latterly it seems to have been cut off and the development of say Chantry House and Crown House, where I used to work interestingly, they created a physical barrier that segregated Kirkgate Station and to en extent Primrose Hill from the city centre. A number of times I've been stopped by people coming out of the station, saying where's the city centre and saying it's over there behind those tall buildings that completely block the view. Or if you're in Wakefield and someone says which way's the station, I have learned to say which station do you want because it's easy to direct them to the wrong one because they don't always want Kirkgate or Westgate just because you're nearer to those. But to tell them how to get to Kirkgate Station is quite difficult so the new changes being proposed by the council, the Kirkgate master plan I think will be really welcome, because it will clear away those 1970s buildings which gives a view again which reunites Kirkgate station with the city centre, which is important. And of course there were no subways, you didn't have to go under that awful subway at the bottom of Kirkgate to get to the station because you could go down Kirkgate, cross the road, go up Leigh Street, William Street, Park Street and arrive at the station. And there was something called the paddock, there were a number of ginnels or footways that you could walk up from Kirkgate that took you right the way up to Marsland Place, Berners Street and even beyond because there were just these back passageways you could walk up, quite narrow but as a child they were fascinating. And again, looking over the walls you could get glimpses of people's gardens, there were some

allotments I think up there as well. They've all been removed and of course they're not seen as pedestrian friendly these days, people don't like using dark passageways at night and during the day time they're seen as a bit threatening so they've all been removed and we've lost them, they've all been opened up. I remember there were some traffic lights on the corner of Leigh Street and Kirkgate and they were one of only two sets I believe anywhere in the city centre, the others being in Wood Street. So there were traffic lights, Peterson Road came into Leigh Street and Leigh Street came into Kirkgate and it was the corner of Leigh Street and Kirkgate where the traffic lights were and they were quite unusual, as I said the only other ones that I could remember were on the corner of Wood Street and the Bullring.

Thank you. I think Lisa mentioned that you had memories or stories about an unexploded bomb?

(Laughs) I have a story, whether it's true or not! This was during the war, my dad was living with his parents at the time in South Street as I understand it, and I never knew whether my dad was making this up or not but the air raid sirens had gone off and people were running to the shelters, wherever the shelters were, and the front door was open and we were coming out of the house and there was a noise and something went through the front door and into the steps and in didn't go off so whether it was a bit of shrapnel, a bit of debris or a bomb, I don't know and my dad used to work, when my dad was conscripted into the army he was in the unexploded bomb team (unintell) so he would go round making bombs that hadn't gone off safe, so sometimes his stories got a bit elaborated so I don't know for definite whether this actually happened or if it's a story or if it's a misremembered memory, but he said something went straight through the open door, through the stairs and into the little bit of cellar but it didn't go off, so if it had I wouldn't be here telling this story now. Wakefield didn't get very much bombing so I never heard anything about Kirkgate Station getting bombed, other people may know, but sometimes my dad was a good romancer.

It seems from what you've been saying that Kirkgate Railway Station and the area that surrounds it has been quite a significant part of your own personal history?

Yes, it's where I've spent lots of my time. My parents, when they got married, moved to a house in Newton Hill but my grandparents on my mum's side and my granddad, my dad's mum died during the war of ill health, it was nothing to do with the war itself and my dad's dad remarried so his second wife, who is my step grandmother was always referred to as Mrs Goodall, she was never accepted as Mrs Trickett, she was Goodall, old lass Goodall and it was my granddad Trickett and Mrs Goodall who married and lived at Brunswick Street bungalows. So we'd go and see them but I spent more time with my mum's parents at Marsland Place and Charles Street. And of course, when my mum and dad went out they would go dancing, they'd go to Unity Hall and the Embassy Ballroom dancing and need a baby sitter so rather than my grandparents coming to our house, I would just go and stay with my grandparents and my brother, so yes, I did used to spend a lot of time in that area. And Kirkgate Station was just a natural ? for anybody interested in trains and from that I developed an interest in trains and got my first electric railway, electric train set when I was seven.

Thank you. Is there anything else that I haven't kind of touched on that you would like to talk about?

Just one little thing. Really it's part of the fact that Wakefield was quite industrial at the time, there were the mills on the river, but one thing that you used to see quite a lot around Kirkgate was the suds coming off the weir because there were detergents in the water and they'd get frothed up as they were going through the weir, so you'd get these clouds of detergent suds and a light breeze and they would fly up in the air and fly over Wakefield and we saw them at Newton Hill, they would come across the sky, this cloud of suds but you used to see that a lot from Kirkgate and of course they would land somewhere and it would take a while for them to disappear as the bubbles popped and melted and they evaporated completely. But that was quite a well known part of Wakefield, the suds going through the air on breezy days.

Thank you very much that's been very interesting.

This is the continuing interview with Kevin Trickett and we're just looking at the map of the area surrounding Kirkgate Station and Kevin is just talking about his memories of it and he's just started talking about Trinity Chuch.

This map appears to be dated 1958 if my interpretation of Roman numerals is correct and on here I can see Trinity Church which was off George Street, I believe and behind Kirkgate and as I understand it, it was the men from Trinity Church who formed a rugby team and they are the precursors to what we now call Wakefield Trinity or Trinity Wildcats. That's where the name comes from, Trinity Church long since demolished, although there is a medical centre there now I believe, and some chemists shops in a new building which stands on the same site. I mentioned earlier on that there was a strong smell of hops and brewing in this part of Wakefield and I can see there's the Eagle Brewery on the south side of Kirkgate between Avison's Yard and Charlotte Street and I can also see that there are some hop houses, malt houses between Brunswick Street and Tavern Street. I mentioned earlier the footpath that you could follow to the paddock and that's visible on this map. And that runs parallel with Brunswick Street and Peterson Road but actually led from at least Ingwell Street, possibly also from Kirkgate. You could walk all the way up the footpath and it would eventually bring you out on Park Lodge Lane and the top part of that was known as the paddock. And from there you could look into people's gardens and there were allotments I believe as well, close by. Ah yes, allotment gardens of course, I can see those. And my grandfather, on my mother's side, had an allotment there because I remember watching him when he was out doing his gardening and we used to come from Marsland Place which would have been up there, just off the map, to the allotments which wasn't very far at all. You can see on this map the cattle pens where cattle, waiting to be transported, would have been held and then put on the trains or if they had been brought into Wakefield for the markets, would have been unloaded there and waited for, either being led down to the market on Market Street or driven there I suppose on lorries. Because the cattle market continued in Wakefield until I think, 1963 so I can remember the cattle market and I can remember the smell as well. But you can see the goods yards here, the marshalling yards, to the east of Kirkgate Station. You can see lots of sidings here providing the chemical works and industrial premises on the waterfront, Pheonix Works there ? Because some of that industry is still there now, in Wakefield, down Calder Vale Road. The Aire and Calder Navigation Yard where the Aire and Calder boardroom buildings are for their headquarters are still there, they've got one of our new plaques on from the Civic Society. And then the corn mills and the soke mills and the original mill here, which I'm pointing at and isn't very good for a sound recording is actually still there, it's right ? to the Hepworth Gallery and the people at the Hepworth wanted to demolish that because it was untidy, it's a piece of Wakefield's history so it's actually been retained and it's been wrapped by an artist in canvas to give us an impression of what it might look like while they wait, plan, decide what to do with it. You can see the dry dock there, the basin where they would have brought barges in for unloading in the warehouses as well.

So this is the building you've just talked about?

Yes, this is where the Hepworth is now, near the weir, the promontory of land which sticks out into the River Calder, there's still a boatyard there now. And there is a painting in the Hepworth collection which shows a boat being built on that site because there were boats built in Wakefield and that mill is visible on that painting. So there's a link there, you know, you can see the history of Wakefield through the paintings as well as through the maps. William Street and Park Street quite built up areas, a lot of that was demolished and Brunswick Street which came down to Monk Street and stopped has been extended to come out into Kirkgate, but William Street itself is gone. Park Street is still there although it's now a dead end at the Kirkgate side because the Wakefield Arms public house is now derelict and very sadly dilapidated and allowed to fall into ruin. It was effectively the station hotel for Kirkgate Station. And I used to work at Crown House which opened on the 24th June 1943 because I moved in from another office with the furniture and we used to go to the pub after work, the Wakefield Arms or the Post Haste pub which I think is now called the Snooty Fox which is at the back of where Crown House was. So yes, we'd work long hours and do

some overtime and then go to the pub afterwards at the end of a long day. And there was jazz being played in the Wakefield Arms of course – Tony Costello and his Wakefield Arms Jazz Band.

Amazing!

And the Kalahari Bushmen as well, supported by Tony. So yes, fascinating, fascinating place. A lot of history in a small part of Wakefield. And I think that's about it for now.

Thank you very much, that's been really interesting.